

WisDems: PACT Act helps toxic-exposed Wisconsin veterans, families get benefits

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, the [Green Bay Press-Gazette](#) reported how the PACT Act is delivering for Wisconsin veterans by expanding VA health care benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

Senator Tammy Baldwin was proud to help pass the PACT Act in 2022 to expand health care eligibility to more than 3.5 million veterans who were exposed to toxins while serving. The PACT Act is the most significant expansion of health care and benefits for veterans in more than 30 years and has already enabled more than 65,000 screenings for toxic exposure in Wisconsin alone.

Green Bay Press-Gazette: [Her husband was exposed to toxic chemicals in military; PACT Act helped Neenah widow get benefits](#)

Since the passing of the PACT Act to provide aid to veterans who have been exposed to toxic burn pits, approximately 66,000 screenings have been done in Wisconsin, according to data from the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Nationally, there have been over 3.4 million veterans screened with 42% reporting at least one exposure.

One of those screenings changed Linda Probst's life. Her husband, Edward Probst of Neenah, died in March at 75 years old. He had served during the Vietnam War and died of service-related hypertension and Parkinson's disease, she said.

In 1968, Probst enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served aboard the heavy cruiser USS

St. Paul in Vietnam and was honorably discharged after two years of service. He was exposed to Agent Orange through the veterans boarding the ship who had been exposed to the chemical, Linda Probst said. At first, he visited the VA in Appleton and tried to file a claim but was denied.

Previously his service-related hypertension and Parkinson's due to exposure to Agent Orange were not recognized.

Linda Probst shared her story during U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin's visit to Green Bay on her "Delivering for our Veterans Tour" around the state to discuss health care options for veterans and the impact of the PACT Act.

The PACT Act — or the Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act — went into effect in January. It expanded VA health care eligibility to more than 3.5 million post-9/11 combat veterans.

It also added 23 medical conditions related to burn pits and toxic exposures to the VA's list of service presumptions including several cancers and chronic respiratory illnesses.

More than 5,700 of those screenings were at the Milo C. Huempfner Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Green Bay. Nearly half of the veterans screened in Green Bay reported at least one exposure concern. About 43% of veterans screened reported at least one exposure statewide.

It wasn't until Edward and Linda Probst met David Holst, the Outagamie County Veterans Service Officer, who went through his medical record in December and found the connection. But Edward Probst's condition declined and he died March 11. The cause of death was hypertension due to Agent Orange Parkinson's.

After going through the process under the new law, Linda Probst was able to get compensation in April.

But for many widowers of veterans, they go without benefits or the support, Holst said. When hypertension became a presumptive condition under the PACT Act, Holst found there were 224 other files in the system to go over to see if they could qualify but that would take time. He would need to see if they were exposed to Agent Orange or another toxic substance and their spouse could have moved to a new

address after the veteran passed away.

“I know the benefits are out there and I want to connect them to the benefits, but how do I find them,” Holst said.

The VA began processing benefits claims for the PACT Act this year. It is the largest and most comprehensive toxic exposure legislation passed.

VA clinics now screen all veterans who come into a clinic for exposure.

“It has helped me dramatically to [be] able to just survive,” Linda Probst said. “To put a roof over my head and pay my doctor bills.”